

(The following article by David Rapier is excellent but contains a few errors in fact. He says that in the DHS class of '81 only 2 students were admitted to Ivy League colleges. In that year, according to school department officials, several more were admitted, but only 2 went because of financial or other reasons. In that class, students did go on to Amherst, Cornell, Mt. Holyoke, Radcliffe, and Williams. David himself is a Yale student. Over the past 2 decades, there have been many Ivy League acceptances from Duxbury, many went to Yale.

David says the King Caesar House was sold to the Historical Society in 1883. The King Caesar House remained in private ownership until 1965, when through efforts of the Historical Society and the Duxbury Clipper, a campaign raised over \$100,000 to buy the house from the estate of the late Emil and Elizabeth Weber-Fulop. The late Garvin Bawden spearheaded this successful effort.

We question whether *Time* magazine cited Duxbury the third drinkingest town in the U.S. From our knowledge, many towns might deserve this title, but until we see in print the facts concerning Duxbury's consumption of alcohol, we will continue to doubt this statement. How can such consumption be measured?

The Clipper thanks David Rapier for allowing us to print this interesting story of Duxbury. --Ed.)

## Duxbury: An Experiment in Stasis

By DAVID RAPIER

### Introduction

Duxbury, Massachusetts, is a coastal town 10 miles north of Plymouth and 35 miles south of Boston. Its settlers were Pilgrims from Plymouth Plantation. Its makeup is almost entirely white, and median socioeconomic status is probably in the upper middle class. Its function in 1628 was to feed Boston. By 1850 it had the largest shipping interests in America with over 20 shipyards. In 1883 it began conservation efforts. The population in 1940 was 2359; in 1960, 4935; in 1970, 7660; and in 1980, 12,063. In 1947 the first zoning ordinance went through, declaring that every house had to have at least one acre of land attached to it. In 1959 a General Plan was instituted, planning for new developments in the coming years. In 1969, the town adopted cluster zoning. Finally, about 4 weeks ago, the Town Meeting declared that more than one family may live in a house, provided that the house is over 20 years old, has over 20,000 square feet of floor space and the appropriate parking space already. The town survives almost exclusively on land tax. For first through 5th graders there are 2 schools; 6th through 12th graders have a middle school and high school, across the street from each other and separated by the town library. There is a law on the books declaring drinking in public illegal. The town has a "green belt" made up of bird sanctuary, golf course and similar items, on the east side, another green belt on the west, and hopes to merge the 2 with a path through the town forest in the center.

### Duxbury: An Experiment in Stasis

Duxbury, Massachusetts, just recently celebrated its 350th birthday. Almost half of its history was passed by the time the Revolutionary War broke out. As home and burial ground of many of the first Pilgrim settlers, it has many claims to fame. Its first and probably most important calling into history is that one of its first settlers was Captain Miles Standish. Its most recent record-setting event was recognition by *Time Magazine* as the town with the third highest per capita rate of alcohol consumption in the country. These 2 happenings, constituting the beginning and the end to date of the town's history, are related. The following synopsis of Duxbury's history is organized under a series of first and greatest attached to the town. The town, in places, reeks of history, and in places, of beer.

### Duxbury: The First Summer Resort Town

Although in the early 20th Century, Duxbury did serve as a summer resort to many, the idea that this theme is taken from the town's conception is vigorously rejected by some. Duxbury was settled in 1629. The people of Plymouth Plantation needed farmland so as to build homesteads for their families. It was determined by the authorities in Plymouth that each settler should receive 20 acres of land for each member of his family, and that the land should ideally have an opening out onto the water, since at that time it was much easier to get around by water than by land. Many of the roads of the town still bear the names of the people on whose farms they were created. In most places, Duxbury was heavily wooded and Indian trails were used to get around. The growing season was in the summer, so the settlers, anxious to begin their new farms, moved up during the summer, and maintained strong ties with the Plymouth Colony. From this, the tradition began that the Pilgrim's resorting to Duxbury in the summer to grow food was sufficient grounds to hail Duxbury as the first summer resort town.

Since East Duxbury was on the water, the first houses were built in that area of town. Other lands were held in reserve for the children of the settlers, or for new people moving in. A town meeting house was quickly built, where services were held on Sundays and community meetings took place for the rest of the week. All major paths led to the meetinghouse. The closeness between town and church functions continued until 1828 -- Duxbury was a theocratic society. When the first meetinghouse needed to be replaced,

the town sold some of its land to the west, and created the Ashdod community. Other communities within the town were created around some common trade or natural landmark. The Island Creek area, for example, was perfect for mills, and we find that Island Creek flows into a little pond called Mill Pond.

In 1640, Marshfield, the town to Duxbury's north, separated from Duxbury. The 2 towns have found issues of contention ever since. In the Revolutionary War, Duxbury had very few Tories, probably less than 10. Marshfield was almost completely Tory, and shortly after the beginning of the war acquired a small army contingent which settled down to watch over Duxbury like a vulture. Finally, at the war's end, Duxbury sent some minutemen to flush out the garrison, but they were rescued by some ships sent down from Boston. It was during this war that Powder Point Avenue earned its name, as it was the location of a powder plant.

Since the easiest means of transportation for a coastal town was by water, Duxbury soon earned its next claim to fame by the people's mastery of the boat-building trade.

#### Nation's Greatest Shipbuilding Center

During the 18th and 19th Centuries, Duxbury was transformed into a one-industry town. Duxbury Beach, a glacial quirk, sheltered most of Duxbury's shores against the stormy weather of the Atlantic Ocean but allowed free access a few miles to the south. At one point in its shipbuilding boom, Duxbury had at least 18 shipyards operating at once. Since the town started out as being heavily wooded, wood was plentiful. All other industries in the town were used as feed-in for the shipbuilding industry. Tar was needed, so a tar kiln was set up, located in the community that is now known as Tarkiln. Clipper ships from Duxbury were soon known all over the world. Many whaling voyages took place on Duxbury ships manned with Duxbury crews. When the California Gold Rush was on, some Duxbury ships undertook to join the search for gold, sailing around South America; and off part of the California coast is a reef where it is said a Duxbury ship went down, most likely the ship Duxbury. The booming shipping industry had various effects on the little town.

#### First Department Store in the U.S.

The Ford Emporium, built in 1779 and bought by the owner, who transformed it into a store where valuable commodities from abroad could be acquired in 1826, was a hangout of Daniel Webster, a youth from Marshfield who later made his own mark in U.S. history. The results of the many voyages abroad by Duxbury people were a steady influx of material wealth, which either stayed with the family of the ship owner or was sold. The Ford Emporium attracted crowds from many surrounding cities, finally earning for itself another distinction: **Largest Store in New England.**

Of course, as with any enterprise that pays well, one must be able to afford the initial investment of shipbuilding before one gets one's first returns. Today, for people who want to embark on new enterprises, banks are available for people to borrow money from at interest rates indicative of our present level of inflation. However, banks were few in the 18th and early 19th Centuries. The closest bank to Duxbury was in Boston, and people did not make use of them much due to a substantial amount of distrust of the institutions. People who sought money for financial endeavors went to an easier source of ready cash, namely, those ship captains who had recently returned from voyages at sea. The 6-12% interest rates are an indication of just how lucrative the shipping industry was. In about 1832, Duxbury's first bank was built by Ezra Weston, the next person in Duxbury's hall of fame.

#### Home of the Nation's Largest Shipowner

Ezra Weston, otherwise known as King Caesar, once owned all of what is now Powder Point Ave. and King Caesar Rd., which is considered to be the richest part of the town even today. The King Caesar House now houses the Duxbury Historical Society, the guardian of Duxbury As It Was.

The Civil War marked the beginning of the demise of Duxbury's shipbuilding era. The state's major shipping port became Boston and other types of ships replaced the old clipper ships. Along with the shipping industry went the lumbering and foundries and other affiliated industries. At that point, Duxbury probably went through its leanest years. A general trend in the town's history has been to tolerate industry only as long as it is useful; when it is no longer needed, it moves out. Some people in the town were lucky enough to have made a goodly amount in the shipping industry while it was around, and so could retire in ease. The plight of the common man was somewhat different. In the 1870's, the next industry arrived, again one for which Duxbury was perfectly suited: Duxbury became a summer resort town, perhaps for the second time.

At this stage in the town's history, there was a very clear layering of the society. The rich people came in the summer and spent enough money paying the natives to be servants that the townspeople could survive for the rest of the year. Some of the older families in town gradually moved away; the Westons sold their house to the Historical Society in 1883. As a supplement to what transportation was still being provided on the water, a stage coach was provided to Boston as early as 1846. Two decades later, Duxbury had a local railroad and the stage coach went only to Kingston where the railroad to Boston was. In 1871, the Boston & Cohasset Railroad was connected with the existing Duxbury line and people could come right to Duxbury from Boston. The town's reaction to the

new form of transportation was mixed: some liked the easy access to the city; some saw it as a potent threat against the shipping industry. Both were right. The reason, or a reason, for the completion of the railroad in 1871 was to facilitate people's coming to the celebration of the creation of the Miles Standish Monument, a tower with a statue on top, built on a mound near the middle of what once was Capt. Standish's 100-acre farm in the Nook area. The railroad then took over the functions of the shipping industry, namely, transportation from Duxbury, transportation of goods, and income. The major change for the town is that the townspeople were earning money now by services rather than production of goods for the boats.

#### **Massachusetts' First Conservation Effort**

The Duxbury Rural Society began buying up land in 1888 for the sake of the preservation of the town. In 1937 a huge section of land in the center of town was bought and made into the Town Forest. A 1975 advertisement in the Duxbury Clipper, the town newspaper, describes some of the earlier conservation efforts:

"About 1625 the first of the Pilgrims came looking at Duxbury. They liked what they saw, and moved in when the land was allotted. They prospered, moderately at first, then greatly as shipbuilding carried the town to heights of glory.

"After shipbuilding, a long quiet period. But here people cared for Duxbury, and in 1880 founded the Rural Society, dedicated to improving the town. It bought the land opposite the First Parish Church and elsewhere, erected street lights and a watering trough, all to beautify the town, a conservation effort 90 years ago!"

The principal motives behind the acquisition of the lands were to ensure that no incoming industry would destroy the town's atmosphere, and to preserve those aspects of the town that made it attractive to the summer people, the town's business. Hence, the efforts of the Rural Society were to stop changes in the town in order to hang on to its newest industry.